

Revisions of U.S. Standard Certificates on Vital Events

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FORMS modeled upon the new U.S. Standard Certificates of Birth, Fetal Death, Death, Marriage, and Divorce or Annulment will come into use in most, if not all of the States, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico on January 1, 1968. While the States decide upon the form and content of the certificates they use and some States include many items in addition to those on the U.S. standard forms, each State is urged to include as a minimum the items which appear on the standard certificates. The National Center for Health Statistics, Public Health Service, routinely publishes data related to these items from microfilm copies of vital records obtained from the States. The revised U.S. standard certificates contain new items which will provide much new information of value about maternal and child health, the growth of American families, and family formation and dissolution.

Background of Current Revision

The U.S. standard certificates have been subject to review and have been modified at various intervals. The standard death certificate of 1900 has been revised eight times, the birth certificate eight times, and the fetal death certificate four times. The standard marriage and divorce forms were introduced in 1956 at the time of the last previous revision of the other certificates.

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A number of persons, agencies, study groups, and special conferences have participated in the current revision. State and Federal officials cooperated in planning the form and content of the certificates. Questionnaires related to possible changes were mailed initially to some 1,200 persons and organizations. Drafts of revised certificates were reviewed and discussed at national meetings of the Public Health Conference on Records and Statistics in 1964 and 1966. The final drafts have been approved, and copies of the new certificates have been sent to the States for adoption. In most States, adoption of new forms will require action by State boards of health or by State legislatures. It is hoped that all States will have new forms in use beginning January 1, 1968.

Birth and Fetal Death Certificates

Several new items related to the health of the mother and child have been added to the live birth and fetal death certificates (figs. 1 and 2). Complications of birth related to pregnancy, complications not related to pregnancy, and complications of labor will provide information, recorded at the time of birth, on the medical condition of the mother. Birth injuries to the child and congenital malformations or anomalies will also be recorded. Data on these items will provide information for programs designed to reduce the number of maternal, fetal, and infant deaths.

Two items on prenatal care—month of pregnancy in which prenatal care began and total

Figure 1. Excerpt from the 1968 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Live Birth

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOR MEDICAL AND HEALTH USE ONLY									
FATHER	RACE—FATHER WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED ELEMENTARY (0,1,2,3,4, . . . OR 8) HIGH SCHOOL (1,2,3, OR 4) COLLEGE (1,2,3,4, OR 5+)			PREVIOUS DELIVERIES—HOW MANY OTHER CHILDREN ARE NOW LIVING WERE BORN ALIVE—HOW DEAD WERE BORN DEAD (FETAL DEATH AT ANY TIME AFTER CONCEPTION)			
	12.		13.			14a.	14b.	14c.	
MOTHER	RACE—MOTHER WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED ELEMENTARY (0,1,2,3,4, . . . OR 8) HIGH SCHOOL (1,2,3, OR 4) COLLEGE (1,2,3,4, OR 5+)			DATE OF LAST LIVE BIRTH MONTH DAY YEAR		DATE OF LAST FETAL DEATH MONTH DAY YEAR	
	15.		16.			17a.		17b.	
DEATH UNDER ONE YEAR OF AGE ENTER STATE FILE NUMBER OF DEATH CERTIFICATE FOR THIS CHILD.	DATE LAST NORMAL MENSES BEGAN MONTH DAY YEAR		MONTH OF PREGNANCY PRENATAL CARE BEGAN FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, ETC. (SPECIFY)		PRENATAL VISITS TOTAL NUMBER (IF NONE, SO STATE)		LEGITIMATE (SPECIFY YES OR NO)		BIRTH WEIGHT
	18.		19a.		19b.		20.		21.
MULTIPLE BIRTHS ENTER STATE FILE NUMBER FOR MATE(S) LIVE BIRTH(S)	COMPLICATIONS RELATED TO PREGNANCY (DESCRIBE OR WRITE "NONE")				BIRTH INJURIES TO CHILD (DESCRIBE OR WRITE "NONE")				
	22.					23.			
FETAL DEATH(S)	COMPLICATIONS NOT RELATED TO PREGNANCY (DESCRIBE OR WRITE "NONE")				CONGENITAL MALFORMATIONS OR ANOMALIES OF CHILD (DESCRIBE OR WRITE "NONE")				
	24.					25.			
	COMPLICATIONS OF LABOR (DESCRIBE OR WRITE "NONE")								
	26.								

number of prenatal visits—will, when related to other facts of birth or fetal death, provide information on the relation of prenatal care to the health of the mother and her baby.

Further information on previous deliveries to the mother will be provided by items on the date of last live birth and the date of last fetal death. These items will not only provide information on the frequency of pregnancies but will also throw light on child spacing and on the effect of a live birth or fetal death upon subsequent pregnancies.

The new birth certificate provides for recording the State file numbers in multiparous births. The purpose of this provision is to facilitate production of data on multiple births from matched records of live birth and of fetal death. Detailed data on plural births have not been available since 1958. It has not been easy to match live births in multiparous events to fetal deaths nor to check on rare events. Once the 1968 revision is in use, such detailed data should become available.

The items on occupation of father and kind of business or industry have been dropped from U.S. Standard Certificates of Live Birth and Fetal Death; the national center never processed these items routinely because of the difficulty of classifying them and of obtaining comparable population data. A query on education of mother and of father was substituted for the occupation item. Long recognized as a social indicator, the item will provide more detailed information on the relation of education and fertility as well as on the relation of education and maternal and child health.

In the section on cause of death on the fetal death certificate, the attending physician is asked to specify whether the death was caused by fetal or maternal conditions. This information will permit the direct (fetal) cause to be distinguished from the contributing (maternal) cause.

No significant changes were introduced in the U.S. Standard Certificate of Death except to add a report form for deaths certified by medi-

Figure 2. Excerpt from the 1968 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Fetal Death

9. PART I. FETAL DEATH WAS CAUSED BY:		[ENTER ONLY ONE CAUSE PER LINE FOR (a), (b), AND (c)]		SPECIFY FETAL OR MATERNAL	
CAUSE	FETAL OR MATERNAL CONDITION DIRECTLY CAUSING FETAL DEATH	(a)	IMMEDIATE CAUSE		
	FETAL AND/OR MATERNAL CONDITIONS, IF ANY, GIVING RISE TO THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE (c), STATING THE UNDERLYING CAUSE LAST	(b)	DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF:		
		(c)	DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF:		
PART II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS OF FETUS OR MOTHER: CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO FETAL DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO CAUSE GIVEN IN PART I (c)		FETUS DIED BEFORE LABOR, DURING LABOR OR DELIVERY, UNKNOWN (SPECIFY)		AUTOPSY (SPECIFY YES OR NO)	IF YES, WERE FINDINGS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING CAUSE OF DEATH
		10.		11a.	11b.

NOTE: Portion of form entitled "Confidential Information for Medical and Health Use Only" same as in figure 1.

Figure 3. Excerpt from the 1968 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Marriage

OFFICIANT	I CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE NAMED PERSONS WERE MARRIED ON: MONTH DAY YEAR			PLACE OF MARRIAGE—COUNTRY		STATE	
	15a. OFFICIANT—SIGNATURE			15b. DATE SIGNED (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)		15c. OFFICIANT—RELIGIOUS OR CIVIL (SPECIFY)	
	15d. WITNESS—SIGNATURE			15e. WITNESS—SIGNATURE			
	16a. LOCAL OFFICIAL MAKING RETURN TO STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT			16b.		DATE RECEIVED BY LOCAL OFFICIAL (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)	
	17a. SIGNATURE			17b.			

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GROOM	RACE—GROOM		NUMBER OF THIS MARRIAGE		IF PREVIOUSLY MARRIED		EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED				
	WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		FIRST, SECOND, ETC. (SPECIFY)		LAST MARRIAGE ENDED BY— DEATH, DIVORCE, OR ANNULMENT (SPECIFY)		DATE MONTH YEAR		ELEMENTARY (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, . . . OR 8) HIGH SCHOOL (1, 2, 3, OR 4) COLLEGE (1, 2, 3, 4, OR 5+)		
	18.		19.		20a.		20b.		21.		
BRIDE	RACE—BRIDE		NUMBER OF THIS MARRIAGE		IF PREVIOUSLY MARRIED		EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED				
	WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		FIRST, SECOND, ETC. (SPECIFY)		LAST MARRIAGE ENDED BY— DEATH, DIVORCE, OR ANNULMENT (SPECIFY)		DATE MONTH YEAR		ELEMENTARY (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, . . . OR 8) HIGH SCHOOL (1, 2, 3, OR 4) COLLEGE (1, 2, 3, 4, OR 5+)		
	22.		23.		24a.		24b.		25.		

cal examiners and coroners. Basic mortality data for the country are derived from State death certificates.

Marriage Certificate

The first U.S. Standard Record of Marriage was introduced in 1956; this record provided States with a model reporting form. The Marriage Registration Area was established in 1957; in 1967, the MRA consists of 38 States. To be admitted to the Marriage Registration Area, States must maintain centralized files, adopt reporting forms containing the items which appear on the standard form, have a system under which local areas report regularly to the State office of vital statistics, and agree to conduct a test of the completeness and accuracy of reporting.

In the 1968 U.S. Standard Certificate of Marriage (fig. 3), several new items will provide more information on family formation. In addition to queries on the number of marriages and the manner in which the last marriage ended (by death, divorce, or annulment), an item has been added asking date the last marriage ended. The addendum will provide information about the spacing of marriages by age, race, education, and other characteristics of the marriage partners. It will, in addition, provide a basis for the construction of tables showing not only the duration of marriages, but also "life expectancies" for periods of widowhood and divorce.

A space for education of bride and groom has been substituted for one on occupation. As in

the case of the birth certificate, information obtained on occupation was difficult to code and process routinely. It was also believed that education may be a more stable indicator of socioeconomic status, especially for young persons of marriageable age, than occupation. National data will be obtained on the "number of this marriage" and the date the last marriage ended and how, by highest grade the bride and groom have completed in elementary school, high school, and college. The amount of schooling persons have received by the time of their first marriage may be as significant a factor for study as age at first marriage. Over time, data on the relative amount of schooling of brides and grooms will indicate shifts in marriage patterns.

Information on the religious affiliation of brides and grooms would be of interest in relation to marriage formation and dissolution, but only two States now collect such information on the certificates. Some religious groups oppose the collection of this information. Yet its unavailability prevents us from obtaining a picture of the marriage patterns of the various religious groups except through certain limited special studies. We do not know, for example, whether Catholics are marrying Protestants more frequently today than in the past or how many Jews marry Protestants or Catholics. We do not have the means of finding answers to many other interesting questions, such as whether cross-marriages have a higher or lower risk of ending in divorce than marriages between co-religionists. While not inquiring about the religious affiliation of the bride and groom, the

Figure 4. Excerpt from the 1968 revision of the U.S. Standard Certificate of Absolute Divorce or Annulment

6a. PLACE OF THIS MARRIAGE—COUNTY		7. STATE (IF NOT IN U.S.A., NAME COUNTRY)		8. DATE OF THIS MARRIAGE (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)		9. APPROXIMATE DATE COUPLE SEPARATED (MONTH, YEAR)	
9a. LIVING CHILDREN—TOTAL NUMBER		9b. UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE		10. PLAINTIFF HUSBAND, WIFE, OTHER (SPECIFY)			
11a. ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF—NAME		11b.		12. ADDRESS (STREET OR R.F.D. NO., CITY OR TOWN, STATE, ZIP)			
13a. I CERTIFY THAT THE MARRIAGE OF THE ABOVE NAMED PERSONS WAS DISSOLVED ON:		MONTH DAY YEAR		13b. TYPE OF DECREE—ABSOLUTE DIVORCE OR ANNULMENT (SPECIFY)		13c. DECREE GRANTED TO HUSBAND, WIFE, OTHER (SPECIFY)	
14a. LEGAL GROUNDS FOR DECREE (SPECIFY)		14b. COUNTY OF DECREE		14c. DATE OF RECORDING (MONTH, DAY, YEAR)		14d. COURT OFFICIAL—SIGNATURE	
14e. COURT OFFICIAL—SIGNATURE		14f. TITLE OF COURT OFFICIAL		14g. COURT—NAME		14h.	
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15. RACE—HUSBAND WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		16. NUMBER OF THIS MARRIAGE FIRST, SECOND, ETC. (SPECIFY)		17. IF PREVIOUSLY MARRIED HOW MANY ENDED BY DEATH DIVORCE OR ANNULMENT (SPECIFY IF NONE)		18. EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED ELEMENTARY HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, . . . OR 8) (1, 2, 3, OR 4) (1, 2, 3, 4, OR 5 +)	
19. RACE—WIFE WHITE, NEGRO, AMERICAN INDIAN, ETC. (SPECIFY)		20. NUMBER OF THIS MARRIAGE FIRST, SECOND, ETC. (SPECIFY)		21. IF PREVIOUSLY MARRIED HOW MANY ENDED BY DEATH DIVORCE OR ANNULMENT (SPECIFY IF NONE)		22. EDUCATION—SPECIFY HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED ELEMENTARY HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, . . . OR 8) (1, 2, 3, OR 4) (1, 2, 3, 4, OR 5 +)	

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1968 marriage certificate will contain an item on whether the person officiating at the marriage was a religious or a civil official.

Certificate of Divorce or Annulment

The first Standard Record of Divorce or Annulment was prepared in 1954, and a Divorce Registration Area for the United States was established in 1958. In 1967, the DRA consists of 22 States.

A number of new items will provide information on the details of divorces, especially with respect to the children of divorced couples, the length of separation before decree was granted, and the number of previous marriages (fig. 4).

The old form asked only for the number of children under 18 years of age; the new certificate, in addition, asks for the total number of living children, thus providing information on the actual number of persons affected by the dissolution of the marriage. To obtain more realistic data on the length of marriage, a new item on the approximate date the couple separated was added. From this information, it will be possible also to ascertain the period between final separation and divorce.

In addition to the item—"number of this marriage," a new item will afford information on whether previous marriages were ended by death or by divorce or annulment. As in the

marriage certificate, a query on education of the husband and wife was substituted for one on occupation; this new item will throw light on social aspects of the family breakdown.

New items seeking information about the attorney for the plaintiff, county of the divorce decree, and name of the court granting the decree will make it easier for officials to obtain data in case of incomplete reporting on the certificate of divorce.

Future Revisions

The next revision of the U.S. standard certificates will probably be underway between 1970 and 1975. More changes in form than in content may then be required because of the limited space for the various items on the present certificate forms used by most States. If additional health data are required, the birth and fetal death certificates may become two-part documents, one part providing the "legal" information (that is, information usually used by the State to identify the person) and the other, the statistical information (that is, data for in-depth analysis of health and demography). Some States already use such forms. Also, technological developments during the next decade may require changes both in the manner of collecting and of processing vital statistics information.